

Ride to NOWHERE

by Findlay Harrigan

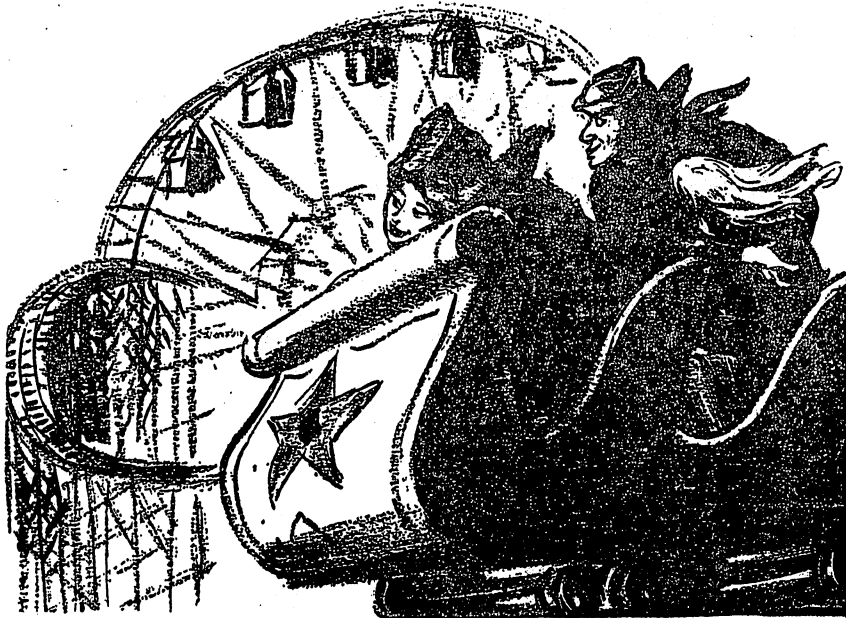
THE SPIDER-WEB whorls and angles of the Ocean City roller coaster looked very insubstantial, a mere draftsman's sketch against the blue sky, certainly not strong enough to sustain the weight of the train of miniature cars crawling, snail-wise, up the first long incline of the structure.

Down on the boardwalk among the tinny music, barkers' cries and hot-dog smells, Mr. Tim Tolliver, feet wide apart and hat on the back of his head, eyed the train's ascent

Based on a radio script originally written for the CBS radio program *Suspense*

By ROBERT L. RICHARDS

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with enthusiasm.

"Let's go next time," he suggested.

Mr. Benjamin Duffy's mild blue gaze traveled over the match-stick construction of the scenic railway, and a faint shudder traversed his ample frame.

"I'll watch," he rejoined. "You go along, Timothy."

The train gained the summit of the incline. From a distance it seemed that the cars poised there an instant, hesitating, before surrendering to the imperative pull of gravity.

Duffy gasped involuntarily as the nose of the train pointed downward and sundry carloads of his fellow human being dove madly toward the colored rooftops and marquees of the amusement park. The fresh sea breeze wafted back the clattering roar of the wheels and the passengers' thin, delighted hysteria.

The cars plunged from sight, rocketed into view again as the train drove irresistibly up a second steep incline on its own momentum, swung around a tight circle of track atop spidery framework, and took another header.

"My treat," pressed Tolliver.

"You're so kind," murmured Duffy, his horrified gaze following the cars around the lower levels.

"The guy who designed this thing," he said, "must have smoked three pipefuls of opium first."

A florid-visaged gentleman in a red-and-yellow blazer and straw hat, stationed on a small elevated rostrum near the turnstile leading to the railway's loading platform, eyed the

Messrs. Tolliver and Duffy calculatingly, taking in their conservatively-cut business suits, neckties, and felt hats, which sharply differentiated them from the sport-clothed generality of passersby. He unlimbered a set of sinewy vocal cords.

"Right this way, ladies and gentlemen, it's the thrill of a lifetime! Yes, sir, it's just as safe as it is sensational, and the price is a thin dime, the tenth part of a dollar—only ten cents, ladies and gentlemen, for the finest, fastest, fanciest ride in the West!"

Tolliver leered sadistically upon his friend. "Listen to that, Ben! Doesn't it make you want to go?"

"It certainly does," moaned Duffy, bitterly ironic.

Tolliver eyed him doubtfully. The gentleman with the serene countenance flourished a beribboned malacca cane between them.

"Why, folks, it ain't just a roller coaster, it's the experience of a lifetime, the thrill of the century, a sensation beside which the atomic bomb pales into me-ere insignificance, a *dipp-ing, roar-ing, swoop-ing* ride by land and by sea, out above the sparkling ocean, down into the bowels of the earth. It's the longest, highest—two, sir? Thank you, there you are, who's next?"

Tolliver held out a dollar bill. "Two."

"Now, wait a minute, Tim . . ."

"Two it is, sir, and *thank* you. Hurry, hurry, hurry, folks, the next trip will leave in only a moment . . ."

Tolliver maneuvered Duffy through

the clicking turnstile. The swelling roar of the train sounded closer over the babble of carnival sounds.

"Don't be silly," Tim soothed him. "People do this all the time. I understand this particular concession has a fairly low accident rate."

"You don't say," Duffy groaned.

The string of cars, packed with laughing, gasping humanity, came sedately up out of the last subterranean stretch of track and braked to a halt alongside the platform.

"No worse than riding to a stick-up in a prowler car," added Tolliver.

"Yeah? Well, I never liked that, either."

The passengers detrained, loudly detailing the perils of their journey.

Tim nodded at the last car. "Let's get on."

Duffy planted his feet like a lassoed steer.

"Definitely not," he said, firmly.

"You mean you won't go? Now, Ben—"

"Definitely not the last seat," amplified Duffy. "I will *not* sit in the last seat. Why, this thing cracks around curves like a whip. That last seat's a plain death-trap."

"O k a y, okay," said Tolliver. "We'll sit in the middle, but it's dull, that way. Fasten your safety belt."

"As if I won't." Ben cinched the wide webbing tightly across his opulent midriff.

"Hang onto your hat, Benny. Here we go!"

The train stirred, as the starter released the brakes. It rolled gently

down an easy slope into an underground passage, gathering speed.

Duffy groaned and shut his eyes. They emerged again into daylight. There was a slight jar, and a cable took hold of the train for the long climb to the top of the first incline. The train slowed to a crawl, and Duffy opened his eyes and stole a look over the side of the car.

Beneath, falling away by the second, was a pavement of red, gold and azure roofs. The wind tore at his hat, and he grasped it with both hands, losing his grip on the back of the seat ahead.

"Exhilarating, isn't it?" Tim grinned.

Ben threw him the look of a betrayed dog, snatched off his hat, sat on it, and renewed his grip on the seat.

The cars were reaching the top, nearly 100 feet above the park. They poised on the dizzy summit for a fractional instant, with the fresh wind whipping around them.

"Here we go!" yelled Tolliver, throwing an arm around Ben. He yelled like a banshee, and, as if by signal, the train dropped like a stone, diving with terrifying speed toward a tiny, square hole in the earth, far, far down and ahead. A shrill cacophony of screams and yells eddied in the wake of the plunging train.

Blackness, as they roared into the tunnel. The thunder of the racing wheels racketed back around them from narrow confines. Then up, and into the light again, as the train stormed the summit of another as-

cent, strained to leap the hairpin-curved tracks below which the Bay waters waited; failed, and dove recklessly at another black-mouthed burrow . . .

Duffy was a shuddering aspic of flesh and bone as the cars slid finally to a halt beside the platform. Slowly encompassing the blessed absence of motion, he opened his eyes.

"Want to go again?" Tim grinned.

Duffy looked at him with horror. "And they shot Lincoln," he murmured.

"Hey, buddy, snap out of it! People waitin' to get on, here!"

"Now look," Duffy told the starter indignantly, "just because your infernal machine leaves me slightly weak, for a second . . ."

He realized the blue-denimed factotum wasn't looking at him, but at someone behind him. He turned.

The starter was shaking a man in the last seat of the last car.

"Come on, bud, let's get goin'!" He straightened up. "Somebody gimme a hand with this guy. He's passed out."

Timothy Tolliver took a long look, scrambled onto the platform, and strode back along the train. The erstwhile passengers crowded around, laughing and wisecracking.

"I knew it was a thrill," a voice commented, "but I didn't know it was *that* good."

The man in the rear seat was a plump, balding pink-faced individual, bareheaded and dressed in a brown business suit. His head lay over the edge of the car; one foot, in a

polished black shoe, projected out the other side of the train. His eyes were closed.

"Wonder he didn't get his head knocked off, ridin' like that," grumbled the starter. You take his shoulders," he said to Tim, and I'll get his feet."

Tolliver knelt beside the train and touched the man's head gently. It was bent at an odd angle to the shoulders. He held the man's wrist in his fingers a moment. Then he stood up.

"Better not move him," he said.

"Call a cop."

"But I gotta get him offa the train—hey . . ." The starter's jaw dropped. "You mean—is the guy—is he—"

"The guy's dead," snapped Tolliver. "That's what I mean. His neck's broken. Call a cop."

"I said it was a death-trap!" Ben Duffy breathed.

The florid-faced character from the barker's rostrum was beside them now, his public manner shucked like a glove. "What's the matter, Jason?"

The starter jerked a thumb. "This guy's dead, he says, Terry."

"Who says?" yelled the barker.

"I do." Tolliver was impatient.

"You want to argue about it?"

"All right, break it up, break it up. What's goin' on here?" A rich, beefy voice with a peat-bog accent rolled over the heads of the crowd.

"That," observed Tolliver, "would be the law arriving."

Two hundred and fifty pounds, more or less, of Hibernian flesh,

topped by a face from an Irish vaudeville act, and clothed in sun-tan khaki, pushed its way through the mob.

"Now then, fall back there, you—all of you! What's the trouble?"

The barker spoke up. "This guy's dead, Casey."

"Is he, now? From what?"

"From a broken neck," Tolliver said.

The cop turned and looked Tim over.

"Who might you be?" he asked.

"I'm the guy who discovered he was dead."

"Did ye, now? Who told ye to go messin' around with him?"

"Take it easy, Casey," said the barker. "He didn't do nothin'. Migawd," he sighed, wagging his head, "every season it's something! Dead guys on the train, yet! That's all I need."

"And how did he get killed, hey? Who broke his neck?"

"It's that last seat in the last car," Ben Duffy pointed out. "Most dangerous spot on the train. Like cracking a whip. You go 'round one of those curves, and—snap!"

"Oh, snap, is it? Who are you, mister?"

"Look," said Tolliver quietly, "there's a man dead, here, officer. It so happens, for your information, that this dead man wasn't on the train when it started."

Several of the onlookers gasped, and Casey's face flushed a thick red color.

"If you're after makin' jokes, my

lad, don't do it," he said warningly.

"I'm not joking," Tolliver persisted patiently. "I happen to know that seat was empty." He indicated Ben. "My friend and I were the last people to get on the train before it started. I wanted to sit in the rear seat; he didn't. So we sat in the middle. The seat was empty when we started."

"You mean this guy rode free?" yelled the barker.

"Hey!" Jason, the starter, pushed forward. "That's right! I remember now—that last seat *was* empty!" He goggled at the man with the broken neck. "That dead guy never got on from this platform!"

"I don't remember selling him a ticket," the barker admitted.

The bulky policeman looked from one to the other.

"It don't make sense!" he exploded.

"Next thing," suggested Tolliver, "you'll be saying the poor guy isn't dead."

Casey glowered at him. "Look, Mister Dick Tracy! This roller coaster train starts out from this platform, rips around the track at ninety miles the hour, an' when it gets back here there's a *dead* man on it who wasn't there when it started. Now, maybe he dropped from the sky?"

He purred the last sentence, glaring at Tim.

Tolliver carefully lit a cigarette. Holding the match, he spoke through cupped hands.

"Figure it out yourself, pal. He

wasn't on the car when it started. You've got witnesses to that. So he must have gotten on somewhere during the trip." He blew a jet of smoke. "Maybe I've got a dirty mind, but a guy who gets on under those circumstances didn't just die."

He paused. The people around the car were suddenly very still. A woman uttered an odd little sound, between a gasp and a cry.

"This man was murdered," Tolliver finished crisply.

From over the pavilioned roofs, above the carnival music, came the long howl of a siren approaching.

MOSCRIP, chief of detectives, came into the small, dirty room and sat down on the edge of a table, one foot swinging. He was a thin, bitter-looking man, with a chewed toothpick permanently grafted to his lower lip. He stared at the floor as he talked.

"You can go home now, folks. Sorry we had to hold you, but you were all along on that dippy-doodle ride with the dead man. We have the coroner's report, now. The unofficial verdict is death from a broken neck." He sighed. "Leave your names and addresses with the desk sergeant outside; in case of any complications, like this man's heirs taking action against the concessionaire or the city, you might be needed as witnesses. That's all."

The crowd moved out through the one door. His hand on the knob, Moscrip looked at Tim Tolliver and

Ben Duffy, who lingered.

"I said, you can go. That's all."

"Just a couple of questions, chief," said Tolliver, "if you don't mind."

Moscrip took his hand off the knob.

"Casey!" he called. He waited, without looking at them.

The bulky cop from the amusement park lumbered in. "Yeah, chief?"

"These the two fellows you told me about?"

"That they are, sir!" Casey eyed Tolliver and Duffy with dislike.

"O k a y, that's all." Moscrip turned his gaze on them. "You're quite an inquisitive young fellow, aren't you?" he said to Tolliver.

"Oh, I don't know." Tim shrugged. "It's my business to be inquisitive."

"And what might your business be, mister—and your names?"

"Tolliver—Timothy Tolliver. This is Ben Duffy, my partner. We're private investigators."

Tolliver slid a business card across the table. Moscrip glanced at it negligently.

"From Chicago, eh? Little off your beat, out here on the Coast, aren't you?"

"We like to travel," Tim said blandly.

"We're on a vacation," supplied Duffy.

Moscrip turned his pale eyes on Ben. "So you can talk, too."

"Only when I have something to say," Ben told him, cheerfully.

"Um. You ought to give your

friend lessons." He lanced a look at Tolliver. "Casey says you seemed to know all about this business out at the roller coaster."

"If Casey means I knew more than he knew," Tim said, "he's right. I happened to be the first one to notice the dead man had a broken neck, and said so. Then I made the sensational deduction that, since he hadn't been on the train when it started, somebody had murdered him and dumped him on. Seemed a little obvious to me, even if it *was* Greek to Casey."

"All right." Moscrip stood up. "You're a brilliant fellow, Tolliver. The Ocean City police department will do its best, starting from where you left off. Goodbye now."

"And goodbye to *you*. Let's go, Ben." Tolliver turned towards the door. "I'm sure these people are perfectly capable of solving the murder of Professor Brighton."

"Just a minute!" Moscrip shut the door and stood in front of it. "How does it happen you know the name's Brighton and he's a professor?"

Tim blinked at him. "Same way I know he's a professor of psychiatry and comes from Chicago."

"So you went through his pockets before my boys' got there."

"Did I say that?"

Moscrip threw away his toothpick and began shredding another one with his teeth.

"Quite a coincidence, you and the prof both being from Chicago . . ."

The door opened and a small gray

man in a small gray suit came in, carrying a small black bag.

"Hello, Chief," he said to Moscrip. He set the bag on the table and ferreted a paper from it. "Here's the report on Brighton's death."

"No autopsy?" Moscrip said, glancing at the paper.

"I don't think so," the coroner said, "unless the family demands one."

"Inquest tomorrow?"

"Right. Here's the stuff from his pockets."

The coroner took a handful of miscellany from the bag, and a white square fluttered to the floor.

Tolliver picked it up.

"Well, well," he commented, whistling gently.

The girl on the photo postcard wore nothing but high-heeled shoes and a Spanish shawl draped—or undraped—strategically about her torso.

"Hand that here, Tolliver." Moscrip spoke sharply, hand extended. "That's material evidence."

Tolliver turned the card over.

"Sheila Kennedy, Temple of Terpisichore, Ocean City," he read. "Hell, and to think we walked right past the place a couple of hours ago, Ben."

He handed the card to the gently-simmering Moscrip.

"Well, Ben—I think we've gotten the good out of this." He smiled at Moscrip. "Be seeing you, Chief."

Moscrip's face went the color of rare roast beef.

"Listen, Tolliver, you're a pretty knowing fellow with regard to this

Brighton murder. Keep on with your smart cracks and you'll talk yourself right into something. I'm warning you."

Tolliver grinned. When he let his smile go, it was a pleasant one. There was no malice in it, now.

"Thanks, Chief. Be seeing you."

"Don't get any ideas about leaving town," Moscrip warned them. "We may want you."

Outside, in the cool seaside air, Ben Duffy let out a long, sigh.

"I can't go for that one. He's a cold, nasty man, Timothy. Boy, but you were asking for it, in there, a couple of times."

"That's all right," Tolliver said, easily. "That postcard cutie was a windfall."

"Listen, Tim, boy—you ain't a foolin' old Ben. We're not just vacationers out here. How about breaking down and telling papa? Why did we come?"

Tolliver grinned. "Well, we had to spend the profits from that Benson fur hijacking case, didn't we?"

"Did we?"

Tolliver slapped him on the back. "Benny, if I'm nuts, and nothing comes of it, you won't be able to laugh at me if you don't know. If I'm right—" He let it trail off there.

"Tell me one thing, then. Has this Brighton murder got anything to do with whatever's on your mighty mind?"

"That one," Tolliver said, "I can answer quickly. I don't know." He gazed over the housetops in the di-

rection from which drifted snatches of honky-tonk music on the late afternoon air. "Yet," he amended. "Come on, Benny, we've got a date—at the Temple of Terpsichore."

A RESPECTABLE total of winters and summers had passed over the Temple of Terpsichore and left their signatures in the form of peeling paint and weathered boards in the facade, which embodied architectural motifs from Arabia, the Taj Mahal and the Parthenon, with overtones of brewèry gothic.

Before this shrine to the more interesting muscles a sort of stage had been erected in the open air, facing on the board walk. At one end of it squatted a stunted Italian boy in a turban and part of an old bathrobe, tootling sadly on a flute. In the middle of the hustings a pair of bored-looking blonde hetairae in soiled pink bandeaux and raffia skirts preserved an air of complete detachment while co-ordinating certain movements of the torso and the sacro-iliac joints.

Timothy Tolliver and Ben Duffy joined a small crowd of middle-aged men and weedy lads who were absorbing the performance.

"Would that be the Kennedy gal?" Ben wondered, in a low voice.

"Uh-uh. The card had her a brunette."

A barker beside the stage took up his cry, above the moaning of the flute. "Oh, they're lovely, they're luscious, they're delightful and they're

daring, the most gorgeous girls, the most beautiful bodies of any show of its kind in the world!" He surveyed the crowd, and reached a decision. "Give a little, girls!"

Each of the blondes, without a change of expression, joined her hands at the back of her neck, executed a chaste bump, and resumed her normal writhing. Stifling a yawn, the barker began again:

"Oh, it's only a quarter, gents, hurry, hurry, hurry, the next full show is about to begin, in which you will see—"

He snatched at Tim's extended greenback, made change, handed him two tickets.

—and thank you, sir, oh, they roll their eyes and they sway their thighs, they'll teach you new tricks and they'll show you new charms . . ."

His voice faded away as Tim and Ben entered the Temple of Terpsichore.

Inside was a hall somewhat larger than a small bedroom, with a Punch-and-Judy-sized stage. A dejected little man in a derby hat watched them enter.

"We're looking for Sheila Kennedy," Tim told him.

"About what?" the little man wanted to know.

"Tell her it's a couple of old friends from Chicago," Tim suggested.

The man seemed unimpressed.

"She's almost ready to go on," he said.

"For who?" Ben asked, looking around at the deserted seats.

Tolliver took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and began folding it into a small square with deliberation.

The man put out his hand and Tim dropped the folded bill into it.

"I'll tell her you're here," he said.

A minute later he was back.

"This way."

He led them down a narrow hallway back of the miniature stage, and knocked on an unpainted door.

"Come in," a girl's voice called.

"Wait outside, will you?" Tolliver said to Duffy.

"So when it's dames, I wait outside."

"This is business," Tim said. "Beat it, lug."

He opened the door and stepped into the room, closing the door after him.

A pretty brunette glanced casually at him. She had one foot on a folding chair, and was doing something to a garter. She put her foot on the floor and looked Tolliver up and down. She was wearing a lavender evening gown split high on one side.

"I don't know you," she said.

"Maybe," said Tim gallantly, "we've both been missing something."

"How did you know I was from Chicago?"

Tim smiled. "It was a good guess."

"Well, you can guess yourself right out again. Beat it."

Tolliver picked up one of a pile of photo postcards on the dressing table.

"Look, Sheila," he said, mildly,

"I didn't come here to make trouble for you."

"Don't worry, you won't." The girl's voice was angry, but with an edge of uncertainty to it. "Do you leave, or do I call a bouncer?"

"Sheila, a man was murdered here in the park, this afternoon."

"Was he?"

"He was from Chicago, too," Tim said, steadily.

She pulled a cigarette from a pack on the dressing table and tapped it nervously against her thumb nail.

"So what?"

"Nothing. Except he had one of these pictures in his pocket, Sheila."

She exhaled, looking him over.

"My picture? There must be at least fifty thousand old goats in the U.S.A. with my picture in their pockets. What about it?"

"How did you know he was old?"

"—I didn't . . . well, I guessed he was!"

Tim grinned. "Nice guessing. Did Professor Brighton come around in the last two or three days to see you about anything, Sheila?"

"No, he didn't. Who are you, anyway, a cop?"

Tolliver pulled the folding chair over to him and sat down straddling it.

"Not exactly, baby. I'm a private detective. I make a living on things like this. Aside from the fact that I just don't like murders."

"Yeah? Well, what's *your* angle on this?"

"I'm kind of looking for one," Tim said.

"Well, you better look someplace else."

"Did the Professor happen to mention anything about—used cars, Sheila?"

She drew smoke into her lungs and sighed out a long plume of it before she answered.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Tolliver sighed, too.

"Okay." He stood up. "Nice to have met you, Sheila. Sorry if I've bothered you. No hard feelings."

"What did you say your name was, mister?"

He turned back into the room.

"Tolliver—Tim, to you."

"Tim—you seem like a nice guy."

"Wait'll you know me better, honey."

She regarded him gravely. "It might have been nice, at that—in Chicago. Listen—Tim. Keep out of this Brighton business."

"Why, honey?"

"For your own good."

"So you do know something about it!"

She shook her head wearily.

"Listen, be smart, and get out of here. You saw what happened to the old guy."

"How did he get on that roller coaster train?"

Knuckles beat against the door.

"Hey Sheila—you're on!"

There was a sound of feet crowding into the hall, a partition away from them.

"Okay, Jimmy!" called the girl.

With her hand on the door, she

turned to him a last time. "Listen, Tim—that roller coaster isn't the only one-way ride to nowhere around here. Watch your step, Chicago!"

She was gone, Tolliver found a back door that let him out into an area of weed-grown sand and tin cans, and found his way around to the boardwalk again.

Ben Duffy was walking up and down, smoking.

"For a business call, that took a long time," he said severely.

"You said business, and you mean monkey business, and you can go to hell," Tim told him. They strolled along the boardwalk. The sun had gone down behind the low buildings and the bare, ugly filigree of the roller coaster was etched in black against the glory of the evening sky. A train of cars shot around one of the upper curves and disappeared in a downward rush, and the clattering roar drifted to them over the rooftops.

"One-way ride to nowhere," Tim said, aloud, his eyes on the place where the train had been an instant before.

"What did you say?"

"I said one-way ride to nowhere."

"A very sensible remark, too."

Ben eyed him with concern. "Listen, Timmy, I know I'm just a dope, but if you want to let me in on some of this stuff, I might be a little help."

"You are in on it, Benjamin, if I turn out to be anything but a dreamy visionary. Which is exactly what I've turned out to be at the

moment. Hey!"

He lifted his nose and sniffed, then halted before a party in a soiled white apron, presiding over a soiled white booth. On a grill at this personage's back, rows of frankfurters, plump and odorous, sizzled gently within their snug jackets.

"Two," Tim said.

"You're giving that word quite a work-out among the various concessionaires today," remarked Ben Duffy. "With mustard," he told the man in the apron.

They stood and munched silently, the cries of the barkers, striving valiantly to corral the last lingering fugitive from home and dinnertime, in their ears.

" . . . Everybody wins . . . three tries for only a dime . . ."

"It was a tip-off, Ben."

"What was?"

"She was afraid to talk."

" . . . A game of skill and not of chance . . . try your luck!"

"She was trying to tell me something."

" . . . See the bullet-proof automobile that took three men on a one-way ride to nowhere! See the most sense—"

"Ben! Where did that come from!"

"From around the next corner to the right . . ."

"Come on!"

They turned the corner on a run. Once around it, however, Tim slowed to a walk.

"Easy, now. Listen."

There was but one barker in view

at the moment, a Latin-appearing man in a sport shirt and panama hat, idling in front of a small, red-and-white-striped tent, next to the entrance of the roller coaster.

"The most sensational exhibit of its kind in the world," stated the panama-crowned Latin, without much conviction. A few strollers glanced his way, as he went on, loudly "Inside you will see the actual bullet-proof automobile in which the famous Jarvis gang sped from the scene of the two-hundred-thousand-dollar Springfield mail robbery, the most daring hold-up of modern times. This is the very limousine in which they were pursued for fifty miles . . . you will see the bullet-holes, you will see the bloodstains. You will see how three of the Jarvis boys died and the fourth became a raving maniac, on that last, fatal, one-way ride to nowhere! Step right in, ladies and gentlemen—"

Ben Duffy looked from the barker and his lurid canvas to Tim Tolliver, and a flash of understanding illuminated his well-fleshed visage.

"So that's it, Tim—The Springfield mail job!"

Tolliver said nothing.

"Wait a minute, though. The case was wound up—like the guy says, three of the Jarvises were killed, and Duke's in the Federal pen, stark raving nuts."

Tolliver nodded. "Right. Just one little loose end to be tied up, Benny—two hundred grand."

Duffy smote himself on the temple with a beefy hand and groaned, in-

dicating despondency concerning the quality of his intellect.

"Of course! They never found the dough. Tim, you think—"

"A ten percent reward, Ben. Twenty thousand smackeroos." He walked over to the discouraged barker. The latter eyed his approach with revived hope.

"Yes, sir, the original bullet-proof automobile, last relic of the Jarvis gang—"

"How much?" asked Tim.

"Two bits, sir, only one thin quarter to see the—"

"Two," said Tolliver.

Money changed hands, and the barker came around to the door of the tent and raised the flap. "Step inside, gents."

Inside the tent reposed a battered blue Buick sedan, tastefully aerated in random patterns by dozens of round, bullet-size holes. Inside, on the torn upholstery, a macabre touch, sprawled four wax clothing-store dummies, on whose hands and faces red paint had been applied freely.

"Now, gentlemen," the Latin began, in a professional singsong, "here we have the genuwine, original automobile that was used by—"

"Business is kind of slow, hey?" said Tim.

"Listen, mister—" the barker began in a truculent tone, but Tolliver held up a placatory hand.

"No offense, chum," he said. "I was about to say, it's too bad. You got a swell exhibit, here. This jalopy's quite an item."

"These goddam hicks!" said the barker dispassionately. "Offer 'em a red-hot attraction an' they walk past in droves. What they want is tired old dames in grass skirts an' toy airplanes to ride in."

"Ain't it the truth," concurred Tolliver, in the voice of one who has known disillusionment. "Say, how'd you happen to get hold of this thing, anyway?"

"My brother found it, on a junkyard in Indiana. Guess the cops musta sold it at auction, or something, after they was finished with it. Y'know, they never did find the dough in that Springfield caper. Looked everywhere for it, too."

"That so?" Tolliver said.

"Yeah. The insurance people had a heavy reward out, too."

"Well," said Tim, "you should have exhibited it in the mid-West. People there—"

"Exactly what another guy told me yesterday," the barker said. "Only he said it with dough."

Ben saw Tolliver swallowed hard.

"You've—you've sold the car?" he heard his partner ask, after a pause.

"Yeah," said the concessionaire. "Found me a sucker. I'm goin' out of business, in this jerk resort. First my two-headed calf, and now this—no good."

"Well . . ." Tim let his voice trail off. "That settles that. Fact is, I was sort of planning to make you an offer myself."

"Yeah? Now, how do you like that?" The barker laughed shortly.

"Three guys in two days!"

"Three!" Tolliver's voice was startled.

"Well—two serious, you might say, yourself an' the actual buyer, an' then there was the old guy—a queer old guy, if you ask me. Asked a hell of a lot of questions. Didn't talk like a showman. He was more like a—a—"

"Maybe a professor?" hazarded Tolliver off-handedly.

"Why, yeah." The barker nodded. "Yeah, sort of. That's funny, you should—" He stared at Tolliver. "You know him?"

Tim laughed. "Not me. Funny though, a fellow like him would be interested in this kind of a show."

"It's kind of funny," observed the barker, eyeing Tolliver, "that so many people want to get hold of this old jalopy. Just struck me."

He leered suspiciously at Tolliver and Ben Duffy.

"You guys ain't in with McGuire, are you?"

"McGuire . . . ?" echoed Ben, blankly.

"Never heard of him," said Tim. "He the buyer?"

The Latin nodded. "Yeah."

"I don't know any McGuires," said Tolliver. "How'd you find him?"

"Well," said the concessionaire, "he came around on his own, just like the rest of you, matter of fact. Cripes!" he exploded. "If I'd known there was so much interest in this buggy, I'd of jacked the price up some. I hadda hunch I shoulda

held out for more dough, but how's a guy to know, in this screwy racket?"

"You think this—McGuire—might be interested in re-selling?"

"Could be. Cost you plenty, though. Confidentially, he paid me a thousand bucks, cash."

"Know where a guy might find him?"

"Well, no, mister, but it happens that you're lucky. McGuire's supposed to be here almost any time, now, to pick up the papers on the car. If you wanta wait . . ."

"We'd like to, if you don't mind."

"Suit yourself. Come on in, back. I was gonna knock off, anyway."

With a burgeoning roar, an invisible roller coaster train seemed to bear directly down upon the tent they stood in. With dramatic suddenness, the sound was wiped out to a blurred rumble somewhere below. Then it returned, greatly diminished. They could hear the slowing click of the car-wheels as the vehicles slowed alongside the platform, next door.

"Wow!" Tim said. "Thought it was coming right inside with us!"

"Damn thing," said the barker. "Drives you nuts if you let it. Goes right underneath that old building, there."

He jerked a thumb at the rear of the tent. "I got my bed in there. Come on, we can go in. McGuire'll be in, too, when he comes."

"Okay," Tim nodded. Then, as on an afterthought, he turned to Duffy. "Ben—maybe we can make a deal

with this McGuire. If we do, he'll want cash, though."

The barker nodded. "Probably will."

"You get on back to the hotel, where we spent so much time this afternoon, remember, and see Moscrip about it, will you?"

"Moscrip . . . ?" Ben said.

"Yeah, sure. The guy we talked to at the hotel. He'll take care of you. See him, and come back as soon as you can."

"Why, sure." Ben moved slowly toward the door. He looked doubtfully back at Tim.

"Get back inside half an hour," said Tim, looking straight at Duffy.

"Right," Ben said.

He disappeared through the tent-door.

The barker ushered Tolliver out the back of the tent, across a narrow yard and into a rickety building.

It was a weatherbeaten one-story structure. There was no way of knowing what lay at either end of it; buildings adjoined it on both sides.

The room they entered was sparsely furnished with an iron hospital cot and a couple of chairs. There were a washstand and mirror in one corner, with a wardrobe opposite it.

"My name's Ferrara," the barker offered. "Sit down anywhere."

"Thanks," Tim said. "My name's Tolliver."

"Pleased to meetcha."

In the silence following the words, there was the low, mounting rumble of the coaster train, next door, as

it left the platform on another trip. The sound swelled, then was muffled.

"Goes right under this building, eh?" Tolliver said.

Ferrara nodded. "Yeah. Comes out right over there." He jerked a thumb at the end of the room. Tim looked and saw a door where he pointed.

He went over to it and took hold of the knob. The door did not open.

"It's nailed up," Ferrara explained.

"Has been, for years."

"Mm." Tim nodded. He came back and sat down on the cot. By the way, does this McGuire have—uh—a business manager with him?"

"Didn't notice—yeah, I think he did have a guy with him. Sort of a dark guy. Flashy dresser. He's been in and out three or four times, last day or so."

"Several times?"

"Oh, in and out. Say . . ." He stopped. The sound of footsteps across the yard outside was plainly audible.

"That's him," said Ferrara.

The door opened as he spoke, and a man walked in. Short but powerful, dressed in a light gray summer suit, he looked as though he had been cast from iron, in one solid piece. A thrusting lower jaw, behind which the upper lip was lost, accented the impression.

He stopped and surveyed the two men in the room, without pleasure. The heavy mouth opened.

"What the hell," he said, in startlingly low, gentle tones.

"Ed," a girl's voice outside said, "I don't like—"

"Neither do I," said the man, his eyes on Tolliver. "Come on in!"

A sudden, whiplash command in his voice seemed to jerk the girl into the room on strings.

It was Sheila Kennedy, dressed now in a modish gray tailored suit. Her dark hair fell in cascades over her shoulders.

Tolliver sat quietly on the edge of the cot, looking at her.

"Hello, Mr. McGuire," Ferrara said. "We was just talking about you."

"Yeah?" McGuire said, almost tenderly. "Who was?"

"Why, me and this gentleman here. He wanted to see you—"

McGuire cut in. "Sheila, was this the guy came to see you?"

"I—I don't know," began the girl. "It's hard to be sure. I—"

"It was me," said Tolliver calmly. Sheila Kennedy stared at him, dark eyes wide. "I guess it was at that," she said, at last.

"Okay," McGuire said, in the tone of a man dusting off his hands to go to work. "Now you run along to the hotel, baby."

"Ed," the girl said, "please don't . . ."

"Do like I tell you," McGuire said. "Send in Pancho on your way out."

"All right, Ed."

She gave Tim a last look, and slipped out. Almost immediately a slender young man with a delicate dark face, wearing a beautiful cream-colored suit, with brown hand-

kerchief, tie and shoes, came in.

"Hi, Ed," he said, a faintly Mexican accent betraying itself in his speech.

"Relax, Pancho," said McGuire. He kept his eyes on Tolliver. "Haven't we met?" he said, in a sociable tone.

"You've got the advantage," said Tolliver blandly.

"Maybe I have, at that," McGuire said, as though enjoying a private joke. "You know Sheila, hey?"

"Thought she was an old friend by the same name," said Tolliver. "I was wrong."

The roller coaster train roared under the building. Pancho's liquid eyes jerked minutely toward the nailed-up door.

Ferrara held out an envelope. "Mr. McGuire, here's the papers."

McGuire took the packet. "Thanks. You want to beat it, Ferrara, and let Mr. —"

"Tolliver," Tim said.

"Yeah. We got some business to talk over, eh?"

"Seems so," said Tim.

When Ferrara was gone, McGuire sat in one of the chairs, a smile on his prognathous face. Pancho lounged against the wall, his eyes on Tim.

"Now, what was it you wanted to see me about?" McGuire asked.

"I understand you bought Ferrara's car."

"Right." He continued to smile. "You interested in—used cars, Mr. Tolliver?"

"Some used cars," Tim qualified.

"How interested?"

"Enough to make an offer."

"Kind of a queer place to come looking for used cars, isn't it?"

"You found one," observed Tim.

"So I did, so I did." His smile vanished, and Pancho, his eyes on McGuire, stirred fractionally against the wall.

"How much do you know about this car?" McGuire asked, and the whiplash cracked in his voice.

Tolliver looked at the chunky, rock-faced man, and laughed.

"Enough," he said.

"And what does 'enough' mean?" McGuire's voice was milk-gentle again.

"Not too much. After the Springfield caper, the dough was never found. Well, I had a bright idea."

"And what was that?" smiled McGuire.

Tim grinned bashfully. "Well, they looked everywhere for that lettuce, and no soap. I got to figuring, and I had a funny hunch. I figured the dough must have been cached in the car someplace."

"You did?" breathed McGuire. "Did you, now?"

Tim nodded. "Yeah. Well, I put a tail on the car, and got it traced to a junk yard in South Bend."

McGuire snapped his fingers. "South Bend!" he said. "That's it! You spent a little time around that junkie, there. That's where I saw you, Tolly, old boy."

"Tim, to my friends," Tim said evenly. "You can call me Mr. Tolliver. So," he went on, "you were

around the junk yard, too, McGuire?"

McGuire nodded genially.

"Looking for antiques, no doubt?"

McGuire shook his head. "Nope," he said. "Looking for used cars. Found it gone, eh?"

"We both found it gone, McGuire. That must be why we're both here."

The cream-suited figure of Pancho twitched erect.

"Boss," spoke the Mexican lad, in a strained voice, "we wasting time. He knows too much!"

McGuire lifted a big hand, pink and powerful-looking, at the end of a blacksmith's arm.

"Relax, Pancho. Now ain't that one of the damndest things?" he asked Tolliver. "Both of us! Know any more things, Tolly?"

"A little," Tim said. "For instance, McGuire, I figure you got your dope on the money being in the car from Duke Jarvis, before you got out of the Federal pen. That was before Duke went wacky. Right?"

"My!" marveled McGuire. He eyed Tim with real admiration. "Right! Tell me something else, now. What makes you so sure I been in the pen?"

"Good God," said Tim, "and you with your mug in every post office in the country on that counterfeiting rap five years ago. What business do you think I'm in, McGuire—Cloaks and Suits?"

"I tell you, he know too much!" Pancho's voice rose.

"You're right, Pancho." The smile was still on McGuire's face, but it was gone from his voice.

"Tolly," he said, "you know what you just talked yourself in for?"

He held his ham-like hands out in front of him and inspected them critically.

"You mean like Professor Breighton?" Tim asked, in a voice that tried to be level.

The roar of the train rose above and around them, and Pancho, with an inarticulate snarl, flung himself at Tolliver, on the bed. Tolliver slid from his sitting position on the cot to the floor. His arms went out, his hands met the legs of the on-rushing Pancho, and pushed. Ice cream clothes over appetite, the dark lad dove over Tim's head. His own sleek head met the wall behind the bed, with a crash that sounded above the roar of the train.

Tolliver was on his feet in the same instant Pancho struck, but the prognathous McGuire was too swift. Moving with a speed his chunky build belied, he flung his blacksmith's arms around the young private detective and held on easily.

"You're younger than Breighton," he said, gently, "but you'll be easier to kill. Smaller neck." He gathered Tim's arms behind him.

On the bed, Pancho stirred. McGuire kicked him, and the Mexican opened his eyes. Slowly, he felt the top of his head, and yelped as his fingers touched the scalp. McGuire chuckled.

"Get up," he said. "Tie his

hands."

Pancho stumbled to his feet, took the brown scarf from his breast pocket, and reached for Tolliver's wrists. Tim kicked viciously at McGuire's shins and wrenched away as the man grunted with pain. Tim seized a chair, swung it above his head and, as McGuire and Pancho both rushed him, crashed it on McGuire's formidable skull. The man screamed with pain, kept coming, and his weight, combined with the Mexican's, bore Tolliver back against the end wall of the room, square against the nailed-up door.

McGuire knelt on Tolliver's chest and, aiming deliberately, landed rights and lefts in succession against the detective's face with his hog-head fists. Under the bruising barrage, Tolliver's head snapped to and fro like a punching bag. His jaw sagged loosely.

McGuire stopped, and breathed heavily.

"He's softened, boss," said the Mexican's voice. "Let him have the business!"

"Yeah," McGuire said, in rough, strained tones. "Yeah."

He took Tim Tolliver's lolling head gently between his huge hands, and gave it an experimental wrench or two on the neck's axis.

The roller coaster roared under the building and slid into the platform, next door.

"Open the door!" McGuire's voice whipped the Mexican.

Pancho produced a hammer from the wardrobe in the room, wrenched

at the door-frame behind Tolliver's body. Nails screamed in wood, and the door came free. A rush of cool night air puffed into the room. Beyond the door black emptiness yawned.

In the silence, the voice of Terry, the barker, came from next door on the gently-blowing breeze:

"All right, folks, let's hurry, hur-ry, hur-ry, the big ride's about to start, buy your seats now for the greatest thrill of the century . . ."

"Give it to him, boss!" Pancho whispered. "The trains she's coming soon!"

McGuire nodded. "Yeah," he said, casually. He nested the point of Tolliver's jaw in his right hand, cuddled the left one firmly around the back of Tim's head, and drew a deep breath.

Fists battered on the door from the yard outside. Ben Duffy's voice, strained with anxiety, called "Tim! Tim—open up!"

The Mexican ripped out a sotto voce oath, and stiffened alongside Tim's slumped figure.

McGuire let the deep breath out, slowly. He kept his hands in place.

The voice of Jason, the starter, came faintly. "Got 'em fastened, folks? Here we go!"

"All right, open up in there!"

The voice was not Ben Duffy's. It had the brutal confidence of the law in its tones.

At the sound, or perhaps as the fresh air blew on his face through the open door, Tim Tolliver's eyes opened. He looked dully at the

room.

"Break it down!" said Moscrip's voice, and a heavy object suggesting a uniformed shoulder, struck the light door. The building shook.

There was a simultaneous rumble from the direction of the roller coaster platform. Pancho, his eyes wild, jerked a small gun from inside his cream-colored jacket.

"The first copper sonofabitch comes through the door gets shot!" announced McGuire coolly, loud enough to be heard outside.

Tim's eyes brightened to awareness. Then, as the rumble of the approaching train came from below and beyond the doorway jumping-off place, Tim's hand moved; his fingers gripped Pancho's unsuspecting ankle, jerked hard.

The Henchman staggered back, off balance, clawing at the air. Straining wildly to save himself, he caught at the doorframe and missed. Then he was falling free, into blackness full of the roar of wheels.

Pancho screamed bubblingly as he fell, and the cars roared invisibly under the opening and passed on. The door gave way at the same moment, catapulting a khaki-clothed policeman into the room as McGuire, snarling, launched himself against the intruder.

There was more than one policeman. For a few minutes there was considerable action in the small room.

LAUGHTER sat strangely on Moscrip's face. It seemed an indecency, one the inevitable toothpick

must resent fiercely. His shoulders were shaking.

"Whatta pinch!" he choked. "When I think of the Mex, falling into the train, riding all the way around the circuit, knowing damned well we were waiting for him at the end of the trip, and afraid to get off the cars . . .!" He doubled up with merriment.

"You shoulda seen his face, Tolliver!"

He sobered slowly, and looked at Tim's court-plastered face.

"Sorry you hadda take that beating," he said. "But you had McGuire talking so nice, in there, I didn't want to bust in until we were sure he wasn't gonna sing any more."

He put on his professional manner, like an overcoat.

"Tell me this," he said. "How did Brighton tumble to the Jarvis escape car?"

"Just one thing," Tolliver said. "His wallet had a pass authorizing him to enter Federal prisons."

"That's right," nodded Moscrip. "But how—"

"Brighton was a psychiatrist," Tolliver pointed out. "When I thought of a Federal pen, I thought of Duke Jarvis. After all, I was out here trying to locate the Jarvis escape car. Well, Duke went nuts in prison. That prison pass in Brighton's wallet tied him right in, for me. As a psychiatrist, he'd been called on to treat Duke. Duke must have let slip something about the money being hidden in the car, probably never knowing he'd said it.

The poor old Prof was human. He made his try at the dough. He might have gotten there first, too, if he hadn't gone to see Sheila Kennedy. That tipped McGuire, of course."

"We know why Brighton contacted the girl," Moscrip supplied. "She cracked up, after she tipped us about you—"

"She tipped you . . .?"

Moscrip's lips grinned again, unwillingly.

"Seems she kinda takes a shine to you, Tolliver. Anyway, she phoned just after your Mister Duffy got here, then waited for us at the roller coaster. And then, she spilled the story of her life. Well, it seems she was Duke Jarvis's girl-friend."

Tolliver snapped his fingers.

"Sure—Jarvis must have talked about her to McGuire, while they were in stir. He mentioned her to Brighton, too. McGuire had to have her where he could watch her—and Brighton traced her to Ocean City

on his own, hoping she'd give him the dope on where the car was."

He looked at Moscrip.

"What are you going to do with her?"

Moscrip yawned, elaborately.

"Nothing, I guess—unless someone wants to file charges. She's downstairs, now."

Tolliver stood up.

"Well, you won't be needing me any more."

"I'm sure you'll be very happy," Moscrip murmured, grinning. "She isn't the worst-looking gal in town, at that."

"Hey!" exclaimed Ben Duffy.

"How about me?"

"Ben," said Tolliver, "this is business."

He dug in his pocket, handed Duffy a dime.

"There's an advance on your ten thousand bucks reward," he said.

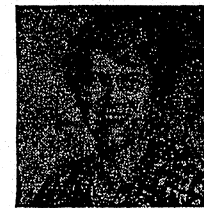
"Go take a ride on the roller coaster."



UNCLE



AUNT



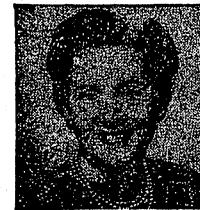
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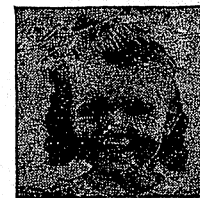
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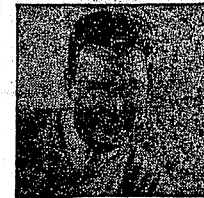
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